

PART IV

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Research has shown that lifestyle choices affect the quality of health and well-being. Since 1988, systolic and diastolic blood pressure levels for children and teenagers have risen substantially, according to a new study supported by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), part of the National Institutes of Health. The study links part of the rise to a concurrent increase in the prevalence of overweight and obesity.

The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reports that chronic diseases and conditions account for at least seven (7) of every ten (10) deaths in the United States and for more than sixty (60) percent of medical care expenditures. In 2000, poor diet and physical inactivity, which contribute to obesity, cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes, accounted for 400,000 actual deaths in the U.S., according to research at HHS' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Only tobacco use caused more preventable deaths. In addition, many chronic diseases result in disability and decrease the quality of life for millions of Americans.

HHS also announced that pre-diabetes – a condition that raises a person's risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke -- is far more common in the United States than previously believed. HHS now estimates that 41 million Americans ages forty (40) to seventy-four (74) have the condition, based on a revised, more accurate definition of pre-diabetes made by an international expert committee of the American Diabetes Association. Many people with pre-diabetes, which is marked by blood glucose levels that are higher than normal but not yet diabetic, go on to develop type 2 diabetes within ten (10) years.

In the 2004 Report of the Governor's Task Force on the Obesity Epidemic, "Obesity in Florida", communities are encouraged to take action by working to provide more opportunities for people to play and exercise that are low cost or free of charge. It concludes that we must work within our communities to help create healthier environments and provide nutritious offerings so people can make the healthy choice the easy choice. The report further states that the obesity epidemic is everyone's problem and needs the help of all of us at the local and state levels.

In 2001, The Health Foundation of South Florida, Inc. and the Mayor of Miami-Dade County, Alex Penelas, created a Mayor's Health and Fitness Challenge Task Force Committee in order to develop a program that would promote physical exercise, nutrition and general wellness among county residents. Other Miami-Dade County departments and entities from the Miami-Dade County Health Department and the private sector were invited to participate in the committee.

The Mayor's Health and Fitness Challenge Task Force Committee Members developed the following:

Mission Statement

- Create a set of events for a year that will increase the awareness/education of health and fitness of the residents of Miami-Dade County and that will encourage and maintain their involvement in healthy activities.

Recommendations:

- Implement a one (1) year program of health and fitness with events and activities that include:
 - Low, medium and high impact challenge activities for all ages
 - Entertaining/informative nutrition and stress reduction seminars
 - Free health screening events

Proposed Goals

- Motivate residents to join the Mayor's Health and Fitness Challenge and to pledge their participation in regular physical activity, as well as to adopt a healthier lifestyle.
- Launch a one year program to promote physical activities for all ages and levels of activity, nutrition education, stress reduction, and participation in free health fairs / screenings. Many of the monthly activities to be conducted in conjunction with a series of community events or on a stand-alone basis.
- Promote existing park activities & facilities—that are available, many free of charge—to all residents, particularly in low-income communities.
- Heighten public awareness through four (4) overall themes:
 - Increase physical activity levels
 - Eat a more nutritious and balanced diet
 - Learn to manage stress more effectively
 - The importance of obtaining regular preventive and primary healthcare screenings

“Get Fit, Eat Right and Chill Out” was chosen to be the slogan for the Mayor's Health and Fitness Challenge.